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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, June 19, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "USING THE SEASON'S EGGS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Hens are laying well this season -- better than last year at this time, according to reports coming to the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The laying season did not begin so early as last year because of the cold weather. But on the first of May the average production of farm flocks the country over was more than 56 eggs per 100 hens, and as there are more laying hens this year, the total egg production on that date was 4 percent greater than a year ago.

Department-of-Agriculture poultry men say that egg production depends not only upon the breeding of the hens but also upon their feed and the amount of sunshine they get. Feed and sunshine are so important that nowadays, on up-to-date commercial poultry farms, the hens get cod-liver oil as regularly as if they were children. The cod-liver oil is mixed with their mash in prescribed amounts. The poultry men have found that hens need vitamin D for good laying capacity, and they get this vitamin both from sunshine and from cod-liver oil. At the same time, the cod-liver oil in the hens' feed, and the sunshine they get, increase the vitamin D content of the eggs, which is important especially in the diet of children.

Now eggs are one of the foods that are nearly always cooked, either by themselves or in combinations with other foods. Their characteristics differ in so many ways, and their uses are so many and so varied that egg cookery is an art in itself. Eggs are useful for adding food value to other dishes, for enriching the flavor of foods and for changing their texture and appearance. For example, they thicken sauces and custards, they lighten quick breads and cakes, the whites give delicacy to frostings and candies and also are the makings of meringue. In fact, any cook is seriously handicapped if she has no eggs to cook with. But every successful cook knows that having eggs isn't enough; you have to know the special little tricks about using them.

The foods people at the Bureau of Home Economics always say that the first principle of egg cookery as of cooking any other protein food is to use as little heat as possible. They explain that the proteins of the egg begin to coagulate as soon as heat reaches them, and that they harden or toughen with too much heat. So the rule for cooking eggs, by themselves or any egg-dish, is to use a low temperature. The foods people have found that eggs cooked at a simmering temperature are much more delicate and delicious than those cooked by boiling. To poach an egg, they break the egg into enough boiling water to cover it, then cover the pan and remove it from the flame. The eggs just stand in the hot water until they are delicately firm. As for eggs cooked in the shell,

most modern cooks know that best results come from starting the eggs in enough water to cover and then heating them to the simmering point and allowing them to stand covered for a few minutes, or dropping them into boiling water, covering them, and removing them from the heat to stand a few minutes.

The same principle of low-temperature cooking applies to that popular egg dish known as the omelet. Of course, there are omelets and omelets in this world. The simplest kind is the French or flat omelet which consists of eggs, a little milk or water, and seasonings as desired. You beat the eggs -- white and yolk together -- add seasonings, then cook on top of the stove over low heat to a jelly-like consistency. Scrambled eggs are this same mixture stirred while cooking.

As for a fluffy omelet, you make that by separating the yolks and whites, adding milk or water and seasoning to the yolks, beating the whites to a stiff foam and folding this foam into the yolk mixture.

Why add the extra liquid, milk or water, to the egg? Because this liquid dilutes the egg slightly and enables it to stand more heat before coagulating. Thus it helps keep the egg more tender. But even with liquid added, a fluffy omelet should cook slowly to allow it to "set" without "falling." Of course, every omelet must be served immediately on a hot platter.

Among the omelet variations is the "white-sauce omelet", which consists of white sauce -- about one-fourth cup to each egg -- combined with the yolks and well-beaten whites folded in. This makes a tender omelet and needs fewer eggs than the plain or fluffy omelet.

The egg dish that goes by the French term "souffle" (soo-flay) is really an omelet thickened with white sauce or crumbs and baked. Souffles have other foods added, of course. Some are made with strained vegetables, others with ground meats, flaked fish, grated cheese. Dessert souffles contain sugar and fruit or chocolate. Some people prefer to thicken a souffle with bread crumbs instead of white sauce, depending upon the consistency of the vegetable or other flavoring.

Carrying the egg-cookery story a step farther brings us to sponge cakes. Sponge cakes are really a development of omelets and souffles. The ingredients are flour, eggs, sugar and salt, with flavoring and a little acid -- lemon juice or cream of tartar. No fat, and no baking powder, or other added leavening in a sponge cake. The yellow sponge cake is essentially a fluffy-omelet mixture thickened with flour, sweetened and flavored, and finally baked in a cake pan. Angel food is really just a meringue thickened with flour. And with all sponge cakes, the first rule of egg cookery applies once more -- Bake just as slowly as possible.

Custards too, those mixtures of eggs, milk, sugar and flavoring -- custards, too, take very low heat for cooking. Soft custards cook best over hot water kept below the boiling point. Baked custards take a slow oven and, even so, must bake standing in a pan of water to protect them from too much heat.

There, listeners -- there you have just a few reminders from the foods people about making the most of all those eggs the hens are laying this season.

